

REVIEW ESSAY

Archaeology and Rabbi Jesus

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Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus: A Re-examination of the Evidence. By Jonathan L. Reed. Harrisburg: Trinity, 2000. xv + 253 pp. ISBN 1-56338-324-1.

In this important, well-written work, Jonathan Reed concludes that first-century Galilee included a thriving Jewish rural and urban culture, that urbanization was influential but not ambient, and that the hypothesis of a Cynic Jesus is "highly unlikely" (p. 218). At each point, the shape of his argument is interesting, and bears comparison with findings in works with which Reed interacts, including Richard Horsley's and James F. Strange's, and works with which he could not interact, including Marianne Sawicki's and my own. To fill out the picture, I have also referred in my reading to Reed's subsequent work with John Dominic Crossan.

JEWISH GALILEE

Reed concludes "that the overall settlement history of Galilee shows a substantial gap after the Assyrian conquest in the eighth century BCE, with an inkling of repopulation beginning in the Persian Period" (p. 52). Hasmonean rule then brings "substantial settlement and population growth," a conclusion he bases on the discovery of "stone vessels, *miqwaoth* in houses but no pork wherever bone profiles are published, and secondary burial with ossuaries in *kokhim*" (pp. 52-53). In short, "Jewish religious indicators permeate Galilean domestic space in the Early Roman Period." To account for this, he prefers the explanation that "Judeans colonized the Galilee and overwhelmed the few prior inhabitants, who may have been earlier Jewish settlers" (p. 53).

Still, he argues on the basis of sayings in "Q" that a Galilean "prophetic role model did not succumb to the Jerusalemite cultic

hegemony" (p. 59). My general agreement with this picture causes me to recommend some cautions. Although Reed refers to Josephus, in this context he does not mention the Galileans' militancy, including violence in the Temple.¹ Perhaps his persistent criticism of Horsley's work makes him discount too much a contribution to which he is in some ways indebted where it concerns social modeling (pp. 112-13). In this same vein, Reed also objects to Horsley's argument of "a revival of indigenous northern Israelite traditions by their later genealogical heirs in Galilee" (p. 60).

To do so, he needs to argue from absence—a perilous course, akin to exegetical arguments from silence. The critical finding here is "that the labor of all the excavations and surveys in Galilee to date has produced literally only a handful of possible seventh- and sixth-century sherds" (p. 31). This indeed disconfirms a strong form of Horsley's argument,² but it seems to me a stretch to conclude that Galilee's "abandonment" (p. 30) was such that it was "totally depopulated" (p. 33). Although the Assyrian campaign may have been genocidal in scope, this need not imply its success. Marginal survival by definition would not include *sui generis* production or architecture. As Sawicki puts the matter, "There is no reason to expect that Galilean villagers built 'public' community centers, whether for educational or political or economic or religious use."³

Who, after all, were those Galilean Jews who welcomed the Hasmonians, and then resisted Herod the Great and Antipas? Even if many may have come from Judea, Reed imagines that earlier Jewish settlers from the Persian Period were also a factor. Where did they come from? Can we really be sure that they did not *claim* to be "genealogical heirs" of Israel in the north? Genealogy is a primary, tool—constructed and constructive—for many peoples in developing what Reed himself calls a "carefully crafted epic imagination to locate themselves on their social map" (p. 60).

1. See Richard A. Horsley, *Archaeology, History and Society in Galilee. The Social Context of Jesus and the Rabbis* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity, 1995), 28-36. In this regard, see also Marianne Sawicki, *Crossing Galilee: Architectures of Contact in the Occupied Land of Jesus* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity, 2000), 135-38; and my *Rabbi Jesus: An Intimate Biography* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 14-15, 90-93, 149, 189, 197, 209-12.

2. In which "much of the Israelite population of Galilee must have remained in their villages or perhaps withdrew into the rugged interior," *Archaeology, History and Society in Galilee*, 23. For an analogy of such a situation subsequent to 135 CE, see Ben Zion Rosenfeld, "The Galilean Valleys (BEQ'AOTH) from the Bible to the Talmud," *RB* 109 (2002): 66-100.

3. Marianne Sawicki, *Crossing Galilee*, 139, and see 138-43. Her reference to the issue of the usage of Aramaic is also apposite.

THE END OF URBANIZED, FIRST-CENTURY GALILEE

Urbanization has been a key concept for the study of Jesus and Galilee since the 1980s, a period during which, according to Reed, Capernaum "grew" from a population of 1,000 to 25,000. Reed is especially critical of Eric Meyers and James F. Strange⁴ (whose regional orientation is nonetheless axiomatic for him) for their suggestion toward the high end of this estimate (p. 65). He is concerned with these and other estimates, but he goes out of his way to distance himself from the facile assumption by which "high numbers are equated with urbanization, and urbanization in turn correlates with Hellenization" (p. 65). This is a helpful disapprobation and lays the groundwork for a trenchant criticism of the hypothesis that Jesus was a philosopher in the manner of the Cynics.

The analysis of Sepphoris as a "consumer city" (Moses Finley's phrase) nicely fills out the social approaches of K. C. Hanson and Douglas E. Oakman,⁵ and Richard Horsley (pp. 66-69). Rather than rely on ancient numbers and the size of public buildings (both of which were subject to notorious exaggeration), Reed asserts that the best way to "estimate the number of residents at an ancient site is by measuring the extent of its ancient ruins and assessing the density of its living quarters" (p. 73). Ostia and Pompeii are good indices of comparison, owing to the unusual extent of both preservation and excavation (p. 74). Following the work of James Packer, Reed arrives at a figure of 30,000 residents for Ostia (p. 75) and of between 8,000 and 12,000 for Pompeii, following Hans Escherman (p. 76). A key factor here is density, which varies widely (360-435 per hectare for Ostia, 125-190 per hectare for Pompeii, p. 74). Reed uses an analogy with Pompeii to yield a population of 8,000-12,000 for Sepphoris during the first century, somewhat lower than in his doctoral dissertation (p. 80 and n. 53).

Herodian Tiberias is put at between 6,000 and 12,000 inhabitants (p. 82). (The lower number is upped to 8,000 on pp. 89 and 96, but this seems inadvertent, a conflation with the population of Sepphoris, which is also mentioned.) By comparison, he gives Capernaum a maximum population of 1,700 and Nazareth 400 (p. 83). These estimates are consonant with my descriptions, and the likely social impact of such cities on small hamlets (pp. 84-89), in terms of tenant farming and debt, is also a point of agreement.⁶ Reed's explanation of

4. Eric Meyers and James F. Strange, *Archaeology, the Rabbis, and Early Christianity* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981), 58.

5. See K. C. Hanson and Douglas E. Oakman, *Palestine in the Time of Jesus: Social Structures and Social Conflicts* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998).

6. Chilton, *Rabbi Jesus*, 3-22, 64-82, 124-49.

debt, however, may sound as if the language that equates indebtedness with sin were peculiar to the Gospels (pp. 97-99), but of course it is common Aramaic.

In this regard, Reed's subsequent work with Crossan is of interest, because it represents a development into a further consideration of cultural issues. For example, one of the key Mishnaic passages in regard to Jesus' *mamzerut* (fatherless social status) is briefly discussed.⁷ This theme apparently came to their attention by means of a manuscript copy of *Rabbi Jesus*⁸ and has since been explored in publications by Sawicki, Andries van Aarde, Meir Bar-Ilan, and me.⁹

Reed helpfully cautions against comparing Tiberias or Sepphoris directly with Caesarea Maritima and Scythopolis, both of which were considerably larger, prettier, and wealthier (pp. 94-96, 123-24). (I should have thought that Jerusalem would be a helpful contrast, as well.) By comparison, Antipas's projects in Galilee have a "wannabe" character, and the lack of a fully developed system of roads is an important factor (p. 117). Reed's cautions about the date, pretension, and jejune construction of the famous theater in Sepphoris are apposite (pp. 119-20).

For this very reason, Reed's comparisons with Pompeii might be qualified. If Antipas had trouble finding inhabitants for Tiberias (so Josephus and Reed, p. 84), and if Sepphoris during the first century was a glorified garrison (as Sawicki emphasizes¹⁰) with a street plan that was as much hope as reality (cf. pp. 90, 95, 110-11, 118, 120), populated by Jews who cherished their "private space" (pp. 125-31), then perhaps we should estimate the given numbers downward. Horsley cautions in regard to the likely distribution of the Galilean population overall (which he estimates at 150,000) that the likely combined population of Sepphoris and Tiberias would not have exceeded 15,000.¹¹

Reed deals with the issue of whether Jesus had contacts with Sepphoris within a readable history of discussion (pp. 103-14). Somehow, he believes that to ask whether Jesus actually went there "tends towards a psychological analysis" (p. 102), although asking about the impact of the city on Galilee is within the purview of archaeology. Of course, one might easily reverse this characterization, because the

7. John Dominic Crossan and Jonathan L. Reed, *Excavating Jesus: Beneath the Stones, Behind the Texts* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001), 42-43.

8. Chilton, *Rabbi Jesus*, 12-17, 72-73, 81, 121.

9. Sawicki, *Crossing Galilee*, 192-94; Andries van Aarde, *Fatherless in Galilee: Jesus as child of God* (Harrisburg: Trinity, 2001). Meir Bar-Ilan, "The Attitude toward *mamzerim* in Jewish Society in Late Antiquity," *Jewish History* 14 (2000): 125-70. B. Chilton, "Jesus, le *mamzer* (Mt 1.18)," *NTS* 46 (2001): 222-27.

10. Sawicki, *Crossing Galilee*, 92-96.

11. Horsley, *Archaeology, History and Society in Galilee*, 45.

issue of what is psychological has become confused in the study of the NT. Psychology properly concerns individual factors that influence a person's emotional adjustments, and usually requires a case history. This is to be distinguished from self-consciousness, as in "the messianic consciousness of Jesus." The latter was a chimera of the last turn of the century and has become conflated with psychology in scholarly jargon. Yet both psychology and self-consciousness are to be distinguished from development, which involves inferences from observable actions or contacts. In this case, if one could settle the issue of Jesus and Sepphoris, it would impinge on the issue of his development, quite aside from psychology or self-consciousness. But the issue is moot, because there is so little evidence, as Reed agrees. Still, he sides with the view that Jesus avoided Sepphoris and Tiberias for a political reason: the enmity of Herod Antipas (p. 137). I have argued to the same effect.¹² What does surprise the reader in this context (p. 132), however, is the unqualified reference to Jesus as being from "the artisan class." This assumption does not fit Reed's description (and others') of the socio-economy of Nazareth (see p. 131¹³ and p. 107).

Capernaum stands out as a topic on which Reed disagrees greatly with the works of both Myers and Strange (pp. 140-48), and he is vociferous in his attack on Downing's description of such places as a haven for Cynics (p. 110). (Crossan's similar argument is passed over in silence here, while Horsley takes it on directly.¹⁴) While agreeing with him in both regards, I wonder whether he has here accounted sufficiently for the difference between Capernaum's fishing culture and a land economy. Reed speaks of "fishing opportunities to supplement the dietary needs of its inhabitants" (p. 144) and of "its fishers' chance meetings on the lake" (p. 148) but does not reflect on the comparatively high degree of organization necessary to maintain what Sawicki calls "an indigenous fishing economy."¹⁵ This is well described by Hanson and Oakman and leads Strange to accept the reference to a customs seat in Matt 9:9.¹⁶ Reed accepts natural contacts with Itureans, Syro-Phoenicians, and the Decapolis (p. 145) yet is very hard on the argument of Capernaum's proximity to the Via Maris. This made me turn back to Rousseau and Aray, where the Via

12. Chilton, *Rabbi Jesus*, 60-63, 148-49, 150-53, 174-82, 263-64, 268.

13. The description of Nazareth in Crossan and Reed, *Excavating Jesus*, 34-36, raises this question even more strongly.

14. Horsley, *Archaeology, History and Society in Galilee*, 1, 44, 91.

15. Sawicki, *Crossing Galilee*, 183.

16. Hanson and Oakman, *Palestine in the Time of Jesus*, 106-10; James F. Strange, "Some Implications of Archaeology for New Testament Studies," in *What Has Archaeology to Do with Faith?* (ed. J. H. Charlesworth and W. P. Weaver; Philadelphia: Trinity, 1992), 23-59, 42.

Maris is a consideration.¹⁷ There is agreement that Capernaum must have been influenced by the foundation of Tiberias (an observation that Sawicki, Strange, and I¹⁸ have also made), because of the opening up of trade on the western side of the Sea of Galilee (pp. 146-48). The point of dispute is whether this should be seen as in proximity to the Via Maris. Because several possible routes to the Mediterranean seem to be involved in any case, this issue is largely terminological. Still, Reed's basic argument, that Capernaum did not lie directly on a major trade route, is important and well made.

These considerations lead Reed to estimate a population of 1,500 inhabitants (p. 52), down a little from the 1,700 he refers to earlier in the volume (and in agreement with Horsley's estimate¹⁹). Just as I would tend to a lower number for Sepphoris, so I would suggest a little increase here. If fishing was a mainstay of the economy, there would have been fewer animals and more people per dwelling in the courtyard houses that both he and Sawicki²⁰ describe (p. 157). Reed is more cautious about the synagogue than Strange (pp. 154-55) or Virgilio C. Corbo,²¹ but the presence of stone vessels confirms the Jewish ethos of the village in his mind (p. 160). He agrees the opportunities for immersing in natural sources of water explains the absence of a bathing pool (pp. 157-58).

Once fishing and trade are seen as remunerative, certain other features of Capernaum become explicable.²² There is evidence of primitive locking mechanisms on doors (p. 159), and remnants of decorated vessels and glass are mentioned (p. 160). Although Reed is rightly skeptical of a permanently deployed garrison in Capernaum except during times of war (p. 162²³), any increase of trade could well have brought greater contact with people such as the centurion (more likely in Capernaum than in Nazareth). The same wealth that is decried in "Q" probably came to Jesus' notice in Capernaum, and Reed confirms the suggestion²⁴ that movable wealth would have been on display (pp. 165, 169).

17. John J. Rousseau and Rami Arav, *Jesus and His World: An Archaeological and Cultural Dictionary* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 39-47.

18. Sawicki, *Crossing Galilee*, 92, 146; Strange, "Some Implications," 46; Chilton, *Rabbi Jesus*, 91.

19. Horsley, *Archaeology, History and Society in Galilee*, 114, citing an article of Reed's and an earlier estimate from James Strange, as well as other sources.

20. Sawicki, *Crossing Galilee*, 18-21.

21. See Virgilio C. Corbo, "Capernaum," *ABD* 1:866-69.

22. So also Horsley, *Archaeology, History and Society in Galilee*, 116.

23. But the reference to the border dispute with Aretas in Josephus should have been mentioned (p. 162), not just Antipas's infamous marriage.

24. See Chilton, *Rabbi Jesus*, 78-82.

THE ARTIFACT "Q"

Reed's desire to develop a social "map" on an archaeological basis is a necessary feature in relating his discipline to exegesis, history, anthropology, and theology. In this task, he would have an ally in Marianne Sawicki, although at times he seems to wish to foreclose the place of social inference in archaeology. Even Meyers and Strange are criticized for "inflated estimates" (p. 65) on the basis of over-reliance on an earlier report from the field (pp. 149-50), although the archaeology of "private space" is very much a part of Reed's own lexicon. Rather than risk interpreting this space, he would prefer to have some actual index of its coordinates.

He finds this index in Q, and falls in with the convention in some circles of naming it Q in citations rather than Matthew and/or Luke. When arguments such as "there are no compelling reasons to move Q outside Galilee" (p. 177) are used, and one is required to believe it is a Greek documentary source in order to proceed (pp. 178-79), this seems a larger demand than ordinary inference. Reed is on firmer ground when he speculates on Q's provenience on the basis of the places named in the alleged source. The northern perspective of the whole is striking, and the reference to Jonah tends to confirm this. But on this topic: if there is anything of a primitive source in this material (oral and/or written), would it not naturally reflect the Galilean provenience and Jerusalem *telos* of Jesus and his movement?

Contention among archaeologists is sometimes used by scholars as an excuse not to refer to them in exegetical, historical, and interpretive studies. Reed shows that this is a facile move, because any discipline, by virtue of being critical, will involve different judgments. But appeals for archaeology to be given its due have largely been heard, and it will not advance the position for one archaeologist to dismiss exegetical arguments that are based on the work of another archaeologist. A case in point is the discussion in Crossan and Reed of "the Church of the Holy Sepulchre"²⁵ that does not take account of Rousseau and Arav's argument that the site lay within the walls of the Herodian city.²⁶ Archaeologists would be well advised to

25. Crossan and Reed, *Excavating Jesus*, 247-50. I am also surprised by their apparent acceptance of the site of "Peter's House" in Capernaum, in view of Reed's discussion (pp. 142-43).

26. Rousseau and Arav, *Jesus and His World*, 112-18; cf. Chilton, *Rabbi Jesus*, 269-72. For a similar position from an evangelical point of view, see J. A. Thompson, *The Bible and Archaeology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 347-49, who observes that "Protestant scholars have not been greatly interested to preserve the reputation of the traditional site of Calvary" (p. 348). This is to be contrasted with the view expressed twenty years later that claims the Holy Sepulchre site is "almost certainly correct"; see Harold W. Mare, "Jerusalem, New Testament," *The New International Dictionary of Biblical Archaeology*

accommodate for disagreement among exegetes as well as among their colleagues. Reed's final plea for dialogue across the spectrum of researchers working on relevant ancient texts (pp. 212-13) is very much to the point.²⁷

However, I am less confident in Reed's analogy of archaeology and exegesis standing in relation to one another as the vertical and horizontal axes of a crossword puzzle. We would perhaps be better off thinking in terms of a mosaic whose overall pattern is unknown, because this hermeneutical lacuna is the stubborn fact we all run up against. The clarity of this book makes the problems it raises as rewarding to consider as the fresh findings it offers. It is a reasonable plea for greater archaeological attention with the discipline of NT scholarship. In this goal, Reed has served our discipline well.

(ed. E. M. Blaiklock, R. K. Harrison, and D. R. Douglass; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 261-65, esp. 264.

27. It does not help his case, however, to say (p. 214), "With rare exceptions, notably the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls or Nag Hammadi Library well over a generation ago, scholars working on Jesus and Galilee with literary evidence simply introduce new methods or innovative theories to analyze these texts." This scarcely does justice to the wealth of knowledge that textual critics, translators, exegetes, and experts in sources outside the NT have brought to bear on the topic.